

Joan Mitchell





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by Marcia Tucker

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This exhibition centers around a large body of Joan Mitchell's most recent paintings, done at her studio in Vétheuil, France, within the past year and a half. It is a selective exhibition, and also includes approximately a dozen works done between 1969 and 1972 which provide a five-year background against which to view the new paintings.

I would like to thank the following people for their help with the show: In Paris, M. Jean Fournier of the Librairie Fournier was an invaluable source of information, photographs, insights and documentation, and his intelligence and dedication to Mitchell's work are gratefully acknowledged; the staff of his gallery, especially Mme. Denise Sugar, were most helpful.

My thanks also to David Anderson of the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, who helped in every possible way with all aspects of the exhibition; to Irving Sandler, who wrote the first article on Joan Mitchell's work in 1957, for generously sharing his information and ideas about her painting with me; to Jacki Ochs who helped with the early stages of organization; to Libby Seaberg

for compiling the bibliography; to Tim Yohn for his careful and perceptive editing of my essay; and to Pam Adler, who compiled the chronology and once again worked on and facilitated every aspect of the exhibition. I am especially grateful to the lenders, without whose generosity the exhibition would not have been possible.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the help of Joan Mitchell, whom I met personally only within the past year, after long familiarity with her work. She made my stay at Vétheuil, in December 1973, an adventure; she can turn an interviewer into the subject of the interview instantly, and left me at the end with as much insight into myself as information about Mitchell. She has my admiration, friendship and thanks.

M.T.

This essay is dedicated to John I. H. Baur with deepest gratitude for his consistent support and encouragement.

“The landscape thinks itself in me.”

—Cézanne

I have often heard Joan Mitchell referred to as “a painter’s painter,” meaning an artist whose work, though often not well known to the general public, is deeply respected and admired by other artists. The phrase suggests that Mitchell is an artist whose work is less concerned with ideas or art issues than with the act of painting itself—with the gesture, physicality and sumptuousness of the pigment she uses.

Even though she is revered by many younger, avant-garde artists, Mitchell considers herself a traditional painter in terms of the influences she acknowledges and her preference for oil paint and canvas, the conventions of “pure” painting. She herself has a strong distaste for the concept of an avant-garde; “I’m not involved with ‘isms’ or what’s *à la mode*,” she says. “I’m very old-fashioned, but not reactionary. My paintings aren’t about art issues. They’re about a feeling that comes to me from the outside, from landscape.”¹ The “feeling-states” which nature (ironically she has called it a “dirty word”)² prompts in Mitchell are expressed nonfiguratively in her work; her concern with landscape, although allusory and metaphorical, is of primary importance.

Mitchell is a second-generation Abstract Expressionist, who matured as an artist in the 1950s in New York. She was born in Chicago in 1926. Her father was a doctor and her mother a poet; both were extremely interested in the arts (her father, she recalls,

spoke French and was fond of Impressionist painting) but her mother’s profession had considerable influence on her. Mitchell has always read voraciously, including a great deal of poetry. She knew many literary figures personally and went to a progressive high school where she was enthusiastically encouraged by her art teacher. She was precocious and recalls, with tongue in cheek, having had a show of watercolors when she was ten years old, and selling her first painting in secondary school.

After several years as a student at Smith College, she attended the Art Institute of Chicago, where she painted in a more or less figurative mode at first; she spent time working from the model, “getting a straight academic training.” She continued in an academic vein until 1947, when she first came to New York, but it was not really until about 1950, when she returned from a two-year trip to Europe (made possible by a fellowship from the Art Institute) that she began to focus on her interest in landscape, becoming increasingly free in her method of handling paint.

Her earliest models were Cézanne, van Gogh, Kandinsky and Matisse, whose works she was able to look at extensively at the Art Institute. After her move to New York, her artistic prototypes were Gorky and de Kooning, whose work she saw at the Whitney Museum on 8th Street, and Kline, whose studio she visited in 1950. (“I saw those black and white paintings on a brick

wall," she recalls, "and it blew my mind.") Another strong early influence was Orozco, whom Mitchell met when she lived in Mexico for two summers while a student. "He was the only painter I ever tried to meet," she says. "He got me interested in Matisse, who he thought was the greatest painter who ever lived."

In the 1950s, once established in New York in a small studio on St. Marks Place, she became part of that community of painters, poets and musicians which comprised the younger "New York School"; she frequented the Cedar Tavern, attended lectures at The Club and was an intrinsic and respected part of the art milieu of the time. In 1951 she was included in the Ninth Street Show, which Friedl Dzubas, a first-generation Abstract Expressionist, described as "a real eye-opener."¹² The show was formed by charter members of The Club, with the help of Leo Castelli. ("I remember," says Dzubas, "Leo carrying pictures out of Joan Mitchell's studio.") Although her first one-woman exhibition was slightly earlier, in 1950 in Minnesota, her inclusion in the Ninth Street Show strengthened her position as one of the important younger artists; she has shown consistently ever since.

During her years in New York—until 1955—Mitchell was one of the few women whose paintings were well received from the start. She says, with irony, that although it was extremely difficult being a woman painter, especially in terms of finding a gallery, "I had it easier because I never even thought that I could be in the major competition, being female." She has always considered herself to be somewhat outside the mainstream in any case, because of her attitudes about painting and her indifference to the polemics of the art world, and because, in 1955, she returned to France to live.

In 1959, Mitchell acquired a studio in the rue Frémicourt, in Paris, and ten years later moved into a house and studio in Vetheuil, about an hour from the city; it is connected to the house in which Monet lived and painted from 1878 to 1881. She moved to France for personal reasons rather than as an attempt to escape the rigors of the New York art world, a move which was very much in keeping with her sense of independence about her

work. Mitchell does not, however, consider herself an expatriate.

For the first generation of Abstract Expressionists, Europe was to be avoided both in terms of art and life-style. A strong sense of chauvinism characterized the late 1940s and early '50s, when American art made its first and most definitive break from European esthetics. However, once American artistic independence was established in the late '50s, a number of artists (among them Al Held, Norman Bluhm, Jack Youngerman, Sam Francis) either visited or settled in Europe. Barbara Rose points out that "one of the most significant differences between first and second generation artists was their attitude toward Europe. For the second generation . . . being outside of New York gave these young painters a kind of independence that was virtually impossible for their peers who worked in the shadow of the 'heroic' generation."¹³

Mitchell is the only one of these artists who still resides there. Leading a quiet life, she sees a few friends who come out to visit at Vetheuil—mostly painters and poets, both French and American—and entertainment consists mostly of talking or walking in the gardens surrounding the house. Usually, Mitchell begins painting in the afternoon, then resumes after dinner and works through until dawn. Her intellectual and physical energy are overwhelming. She is a wiry, intense person of vast curiosity and blunt, disconcerting honesty. She listens to music of every kind while she is painting, and paces restlessly when she isn't. ("Music, poems, landscape and dogs make me want to paint," she says. "And painting is what allows me to survive.")

The work, after the first formative years in which Mitchell turned from figuration to abstraction and thence to landscape, is characterized by an attitude about painting which informs her painterly style. Mitchell insists that her work is first and foremost about "feeling." In this sense, her attitude is characteristic of the Abstract Expressionist esthetic, which seeks the immediate expression of a feeling through the physical act of painting, but

Mitchell dislikes the categorization of the word “expressionist,” since her work is in no sense autobiographical or emotionally self-expressive. “It comes from and is about landscape, not about me.” Her work, however, does express a strong sense of physicality by its large size, by the importance of the gesture, and by the residue of the painting process itself which is part of the final image.

Nonetheless, Mitchell doesn’t feel that she’s an “action painter” because “I spend a lot of time looking at the work;” she emphasizes that she studies her work from as far away as possible, establishing both a physical (and, by implication, a critical) distance from it. “I paint from a distance,” she says. “I decide what I’m going to do from a distance. The freedom in my work is quite controlled; I don’t close my eyes and hope for the best.”⁴

Mitchell is highly critical of her own oeuvre; she has destroyed many paintings and rarely repaints an area, preferring to add color rather than to scrape down and re-do a section of the canvas. What she seeks is “accuracy,” by which she means the successful transposition onto the canvas of a feeling about a remembered landscape—or a remembered feeling about a landscape. “I carry my landscapes around with me,” she has said.⁵ Accuracy is achieved by establishing the specific quality of light, color, space and surface evocative of such feeling-states.

Mitchell is a landscape painter, but her images are not those of recognizable landscape. She does not paint directly from nature. “I would rather leave Nature to itself,” she wrote in 1957. “It is quite beautiful enough as it is. I do not want to improve it . . . I could certainly never mirror it. I would like more to paint what it leaves me with.”⁶

Mitchell’s obsession with landscape has been deeper and more enduring than that of any of her contemporaries, and it is by virtue of her subject matter that she stands somewhat apart from other Abstract Expressionists.⁷ She is also remarkable for remaining as committed to it today as ever; with few exceptions, such as Richard Diebenkorn and Sam Francis, contemporary landscape painters are realist or figurative artists. Mitchell con-

tinues the romantic tradition of landscape paintings as “a focus for our own emotions,”⁸ but in her case “emotions” are metaphoric rather than personal. That she is working in a presently unfashionable mode is of no importance to her. She is indifferent to the dictates of esthetic taste. She says that she continues working in this manner because she’s never exhausted a subject or “used up my material.” The evolution in her work is slow. “No changes are precipitous. The subject is in my head, a feeling about things. I’ve never gone from figurative to abstract to conceptual.”

Early work in New York prior to 1955 made occasional reference to urban spaces; the dense, horizontal skeins of paint, propelled toward the center of the canvas and coalescing there, dealt with the imagery of the city more by virtue of their suggestive energy than by mimesis. Even in those years, though, many pictures dealt with remembered landscapes from travels in Mexico, Europe and the American Midwest. These paintings had large, open, airy fields of white against which terse, sketchy, horizontal skeins of paint were deployed; they alternated with vertical drips of paint and smudged or wiped areas situated both in front of and behind the predominant linear latticework. During this period, the image of the bridge was a recurrent and favorite one, an image which related to concepts of spanning, building, joining, vertiginous height and structure.⁹ In the later paintings she abandoned urban concepts to concentrate on responses to purely natural phenomena.

In Mitchell’s paintings of the late ’50s and early ’60s, painterly areas and linear markings alternate within a single canvas, the whole appearing as a dense, flat webbing which remains at the same visual or spatial distance from the viewer no matter at what distance the painting is actually viewed. Such work calls to mind Giacometti’s sculpted figures, holding their tremulous, shimmering position in space regardless of the viewer’s physical relationship to them. The images in Mitchell’s paintings float, suspended and remote, but burning with an intensity that is troubling because they are inaccessible. Perhaps this is what Mitchell means when she says that she likes to have her paintings “keep still.” “I want

them to hold one image, despite all the activity. It's a kind of plumb line that dancers have; they have to be perfectly balanced, the more frenetic the activity is."

In the middle 1960s, Mitchell's style became denser and more painterly. Less white appeared around the edges of the picture, and the surface became more heavily packed. A circular rather than cat's-cradle form began to emerge around 1966 in the *La Seine* group of paintings. The following year, 1967, the circular forms detached themselves from the thinner webs and skeins of surrounding pigment and became solid forms against paler, more elusive backgrounds. The figure-ground relationship of this group of paintings, as well as the subsequent Sunflower group,¹⁷ directly presages some of the concerns in the very recent work.

Mitchell has always been interested in the figure-ground relationships in her work; in fact, this is the only purely formal issue with which she verbally acknowledges a concern. "I do think about how it's working," she says, "and by that I mean making the background equal to the subject in weight. On the other hand, I'm not at all interested in 'composition.' I don't mind having all the weight in the middle or on one side, or all the edges finished or unfinished." In the new paintings, such as *Clearing* or *Les Bluets*, the figure-ground relationship is especially striking; dark, saturated blocklike shapes and round, open forms are juxtaposed against lighter, ethereal fields of color. The active, scumbled round forms in the earliest work in the exhibition—*Sans Neige II* (1969) and *Blueberry* (1970)—appear again in *Closed Territory* or *Field for Skyes* in an expanded and more specifically oppositional mode. It is really in the 1970-71 group of paintings (including *Salut Sally*, *White Territory* and *La Ligne de la Rupture*) that such intense, scumbled and more calligraphic areas are first played off against larger, blocked forms, and highlighted by raking drips that appear over and behind them. This is one of Mitchell's finest series because the paintings juxtapose a sumptuous surface with a compositional awkwardness that makes them seem almost humanly vulnerable. *La Ligne de la Rupture*



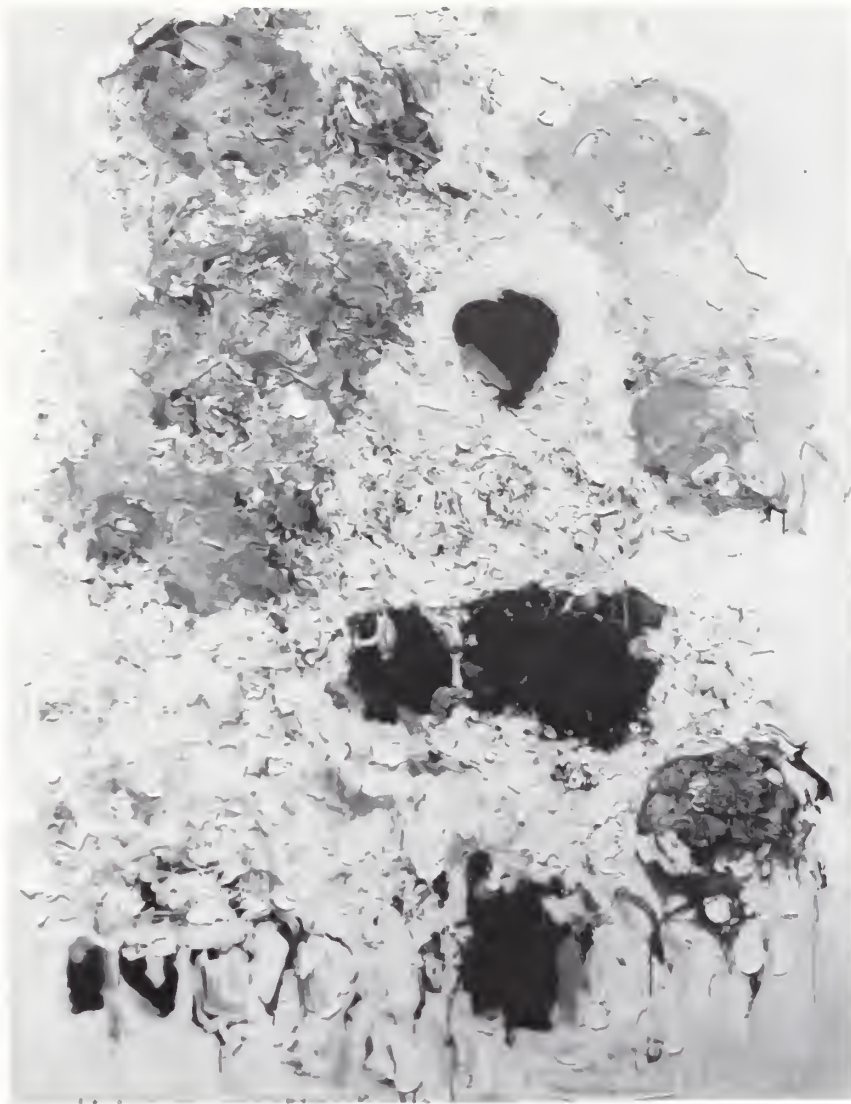
Sans Neige II, 1969. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Leon Anthony Arkus, Pittsburgh.



Salut Sally. 1970. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.



"La Ligne De La Rupture" A Poem by Jacques Dupin. 1970-71.
Collection of Moya Connell-McDowell, New York.



Blueberry. 1969-70. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Hillman,
Pittsburgh.



White Territory. 1970-71.
Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.

(1970-71) shows Mitchell's extraordinary mastery of color, utilizing highly saturated, opposing hues (iridescent blues and oranges, for example, often found in her work of the past ten years) against areas of pale, thinly washed pastel color. The impasto and strong tonality of the major images in this painting do not overwhelm the more delicate passages; rather they reinforce, or reassert, their autonomy, as though in the face of danger.

Similarly, *White Territory* (1970-71) has a large, squarish area of bitter green in the top left that defies the rules of composition, but rather than being top-heavy, the painting appears to be free of the laws of gravity and establishes its own space. Most of Mitchell's work does not seem to be involved so much with the illusion of space behind the picture plane as with gravitational space, that is, above and below it. *Preface for Chris* and *They Never Appeared with the White*, both diptychs, are two very recent works which emphasize this spatial quality, partly because there are fewer elements in the paintings and they are small in relation to the fields in which they are situated.

Three major triptychs from 1971-72 (*Bonjour Julie*, *Plowed Field* and *Wet Orange*) are densely packed and intensely chromatic, and differ from the more recent triptychs in spatial concept and imagery. The large triptychs of 1973, such as *Chasse Interdite*, *Iva* or *Clearing*, appear to be the inverse of those preceding them. In *Wet Orange*, for example, the entire surface of the painting is equally activated; color energy (areas of brilliant tangerine and intense indigo) is weighted against the somberness of massive blocks of deep brown or green pigment. Providing a linear counterpoint, drips are deployed throughout the three panels of the painting, so that the overall effect is one of a continuous flow of energy without a specific resting place for the eye.

In *Clearing*, on the other hand, the forms alternately condense and disperse; the intensity of concentration on one area, such as the two deep purple-blue circular forms in *Clearing* or the forest-green blocks in the center panel of *Field for Skyes*, are balanced against an expanse of pale grays, mauves, lemon-yellows or white.

The formal elements in Mitchell's work—among them large size, intense and subtle coloristic interplays, virtuoso paint handling, light, multiple format, figure-ground relationships—are always at the service of a larger concept of what painting is for her, perhaps because she is uninterested in the relationship of her painting to other paintings, or of herself as an artist to other artists or, indeed, because she is not concerned with the polemics of being an artist at all. "The painting," she says, "is just a surface to be covered. Paintings aren't about the person who makes them, either. My paintings have to do with feeling, yet it's pretentious to say they're about feelings, too, because if you don't get it across, it's nothing."

Ultimately, all formal resources at Mitchell's disposal are used or discarded, directed toward or engendered by landscape and, from time to time, the people and things that occupy such landscapes in a non-literal way. Thus, the large size of her paintings, their sheer energy, most often violent (as in *Closed Territory*) but sometimes luminously tranquil (as in *They Never Appeared with the White*), relate less for her to the "action painting" of the late 1950s in New York than to certain stubborn physical facts ("I've worn glasses since I was three, because I was farsighted. I've always had to look at a picture from way back. Because of this, I'm also more at ease when I'm working large.") and, more important, to the relationship of the artist to the scale of the landscape itself. The immensity of sky, sea, mountain, lake, the infinite perspective of seen landscape and multiplicity of our perception of it are translated as "felt" landscape. The emotional corollary, which Mitchell stresses "has nothing to do with me but has to do with the feeling that comes from landscape," is an intensity which communicates more clearly in a scale which is analogous to the scale of the subject matter.

Mitchell's concern with having light in her work is a classic one for landscape painters, light being a perfect vehicle for the expression of meaning. Kenneth Clark, in a 1949 volume about landscape painting, noted that "facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality;

and, in landscape, this all-embracing love is expressed by light.”¹¹ Lawrence Alloway more recently commented that, for the Abstract Expressionists, “light itself is part of an expressive tradition that includes radiance as an image of revelation.”¹²

Mitchell’s comments on light seem to enforce this view. She says: “Light is something very special. It has nothing to do with white. Either you see it or you don’t. De La Tour doesn’t have light; Monet hasn’t any light; Matisse, Goya, Chardin, van Gogh, Sam Francis, Kline have it for me. But it has nothing to do with being the best painter at all.”

Another formal device which Mitchell has employed virtually throughout her career is the multipaneled painting; although she has worked with single canvases, she has a marked preference for the diptych, the triptych, and on occasion four- and five-panel paintings. In one way she is continuing an early and venerated mode of religious painting that began with late medieval altarpieces and reached a high point in the Italian altar and predella paintings of the 16th century, or the 15th- and 16th-century Spanish *retablos*. Mark Rothko’s paintings of 1966-68 for the Rothko Chapel in Texas and Barnett Newman’s *Stations of The Cross* (1958-66) are late examples of the expression of profoundly religious concepts in abstract painting, and their work in this vein from the late 1940s on set a precedent for emphasis on content as well as formal values. Mitchell’s use of the panel painting has other connotations, however, which are more in keeping with her attitude toward nature. The use of multiple panels in her work becomes a means of alluding to the passage of time, as canvases with multiple images change from framework to framework as well as within the confines of a single unit. The passage of visual time, like the passage and changing of seasons, provides a lateral dimension in the work so that the images must be read across the expanse of canvas as well as into it. (It was perhaps this use of the multiple format, as well as the speed and intensity of her markings that led critics in the late 1950s and early ’60s to compare Mitchell’s paintings with those of Duchamp, especially his *Nude Descending a Staircase II* [1912].¹³)

Mitchell’s use of a centralized image, which occurs often in the new paintings, does not have symbolic intent on her part, but it does lend itself to a metaphoric reading. There are many more rounded forms, or forms which suggest roundness, in the 1973 works than in earlier ones, providing a visual metaphor of isolation, “a figure of being that is concentrated upon itself”¹⁴ which expresses succinctly, by paradoxical analogy, what is outside itself. The space in paintings like *Les Bluets* or *Clearing* is more metaphysical than formal or compositional; in a sense, it is space by implication rather than illusion. The notion of center, in fact, is both physical and existential; the world itself, since earliest times, has been thought of as centralized, and we think of ourselves as being at the center of the universe. Moreover,

from the very beginning . . . the centre represents to man what is known in contrast to the unknown and somewhat frightening world around. It is the point where he acquires position as a thinking being in space, the point where he “lingers” and “lives” in space.¹⁵

Lawrence Alloway notes that

Abstract Expressionism achieved a new alignment of the existing styles of modern art and found a way of painting that maintained flatness without any diminishment of signification. . . . There is ample evidence [of the artists’] conviction that art was a projection of their humanity.¹⁶

Concepts such as that of centralization are first learned through our relationship to nature, landscape in particular being a primary focus for humanity’s manipulation and organization of the environment; it is a manipulation which includes, on a less obvious level than landscape planning, the artist’s interpretation of natural phenomena. An existential exploration of landscape in painting was (and in Mitchell’s case, still is) a major facet of

Abstract Expressionism, being a perfect vehicle for phenomenological rather than obvious signification in works of art.

Some insight into the possible metaphoric content of Mitchell's paintings can be gleaned from their subject matter. Although she does not title her work until it leaves the studio, the titles nevertheless indicate several predominant themes which are strong indications of her own response to the images and feelings in her work. Among these subjects or themes are: water (lakes, ocean, rivers) and the juxtaposition of water and land (beaches, bridges, islands), fields and territories.

Water has always been a major source of imagery for Mitchell, and since childhood she has been fascinated by lake storms and large bodies of water, like Lake Michigan in Chicago where she grew up. The concept of the lake has profound meaning; for example, in Thoreau's words, "a lake is the landscape's most beautiful and expressive feature. It is earth's eye, looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."¹⁷ Gaston Bachelard, the French philosopher, speaks of collecting many literary images "in which the pond is the very eye of the landscape, the reflection in water of the first view that the universe has of itself, and the heightened beauty of a reflected landscape presented as the very root of cosmic narcissism."¹⁸ Mitchell's *Lac Achigon*, a recent single-panel painting, distinctly reflective in mood with a pale, blue-white shimmering surface and two black floating forms that appear to thrust up from the surface rather than to sit on it, suggests in the juxtaposition of the forms the juxtaposition of land and water with the implication of harbor, another basic image with primal connotations of security, safety, attachment or belonging.¹⁹ In fact, many of Mitchell's works in which the titles refer to bodies of water, beaches, rivers or tides, are those in which there is a striking abutment of massive, more stable forms against fluctuating, even overlapping expanses of lighter pigment: *Mooring* (1971) and *Plage* (1973) closely resemble *Lac Achigon* in this respect.

In Mitchell's many "field" paintings, among them the large triptych entitled *Plowed Field* of 1971 the smaller *The Fields II*

of the same year and *Field for Skyes* (1973), there is an analogy between the formal aspects of the painting and the physical nature of her subject matter. They contain densely packed surfaces, in which the bottom part of the canvas is more heavily weighted than the top, causing the picture plane to tilt backwards in a kind of receding image, yet remain flat. In the "field" paintings, Mitchell tends not to use the more transient blue tones associated with sky and water, and generally employs richer, earthier tones. These works have a distinctly planar, horizontal cast to them, and often the images are regularly distributed across the canvas. The concept of the field often signifies the modification or ordering of nature by man; moreover, one recognizes a field by the way in which an area is visually organized. A field stretches into the distance, and no matter where we are in it, it extends beyond what the body can cover easily; a clearing, for instance, can be small enough to be rapidly explored, but a field, by definition, cannot. Mitchell's "field" paintings are those that most keep their distance from the viewer, that hold a single image at a remove.

The more general concept of territory, an area marked out and distinguished from surrounding areas, is suggested by many of Mitchell's paintings and involves an essential aspect of her art in which the canvas itself can and does become an active, immediate modification of her physical and emotional environment. It is characteristic of the human organism to create "sanctuaries and structures of physical security and psychic identity"²⁰ by marking off an area to occupy. Creating a "real" island upon which to be isolated, or building a structure to separate oneself from the surroundings says something specific—in all cultures—about concentration, privacy, distinctiveness, even ritual. Similarly, an "island" of paint (a condensed form which stands apart from its painted ground) can signify, or at least evoke, similar feeling-states. A person's emotional relationship to the environment is of primary importance to the individual and to society as well. Mitchell's remembered landscape is the source for her work, rather than the landscape immediately at hand—even in such a beautiful place as Vêtheuil—because, in the act of painting, she is

making a new environment rather than interpreting an existing one. Consequently, certain images evoke sensations of sanctuary, isolation and disparateness, especially in painting like *Clearing* or *Close* where solitary forms predominate.

Territory is a clearly defined area, distinct not only by virtue of isolation but demarcation. It implies possession, dominion, location, personal space, definition; physical or spatial territory is also emotional territory, depending on what is invested in it. Visual analogies in Mitchell's work—as in *Blue Territory*, *White Territory* or *Closed Territory*—suggest the definition of a mood through the location and distinction of color. In the white painting, territory is defined by the ground, pushing up beneath a cube-like green mass; in the blue painting it is defined by the densely pigmented, compact blocks and strokes of red-brown, ultramarine and ochre. *Closed Territory*, on the other hand, establishes itself by an interplay between massive, midnight blue forms and

fiery passages of loosely brushed pigment, whose struggle to displace each other plays itself out over the panels of the triptych.

Mitchell's work since the middle 1950s, although not widely known, has met with an enthusiastic response from artists as well as a small but varied public audience. Her substantial reputation is based on the fact that her work, brilliantly conceived, flawlessly executed, shows us the extent to which a tradition can be made viable by excellence. Although Mitchell is no longer an Abstract Expressionist, the basic thrust and intent of her paintings are the same now as they were then. What is expressed by her work—which is private, vulnerable, full of the energy of madness and genius, elegance and unparalleled physical intensity—are those primal forces found in the natural world which provide us with the metaphors for our own existence.

Marcia Tucker
Curator

1. All quotations from Joan Mitchell, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from conversations held with the author in December 1973, at Vetheuil, France.
2. Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Friedl Dzubas," *Artforum*, vol. IV, no. 1, September 1965, p. 52.
3. Barbara Rose, "Second Generation, Academy and Breakthrough," *Artforum*, vol. IV, no. 1, September 1965, p. 60.
4. Irving Sandler, "Joan Mitchell Paints a Picture," *Art News*, vol. 57, October 1957, p. 47.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
6. Letter to John I. H. Baur, reprinted in part in Whitney Museum of American Art, *Nature in Abstraction*, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1958, p. 75.
7. Barbara Rose comments that the use of subject matter, or "the struggle with semi-abstract styles," was to some extent a measure of quality in Abstract Expressionist painting. She says that "painters such as Mitchell and Goodnough and . . . Frankenthaler, who were inspired by landscape motifs rather than by the figure, seemed to fare better [than others]." Rose, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
8. Kenneth Clark, *Landscape into Art*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1949, 1961, p. 142.
9. Sandler, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
10. This grouping of her work from 1966 to 1972 is found in the Everson Museum of Art's catalogue, *Joan Mitchell, 'My Five Years in the Country.'* introduction by James Harithas, Syracuse, New York, 1972. Mitchell herself says "series is actually a French word; I see the work organized in terms of subjects, rather than 'series.'"
 11. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
 12. Lawrence Alloway, "Residual Sign System in Abstract Expressionism," *Artforum*, vol. XII, no. 3, November 1973, p. 39.
 13. See Paul Brach, Review, *The Art Digest*, vol. 26, January 15, 1952, p. 17; or Eleanor C. Munro, "The Found Generation," *Art News*, November 1961, p. 38.
 14. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, p. 239.
 15. Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Existence, Space and Architecture*, Praeger Publishers, New York and Washington, 1971, p. 19.
 16. Alloway, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
 17. Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
 19. Norberg-Schulz, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Bonjour Julie. 1971. Courtesy the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.







The Fields II. 1971. Privately owned.



Plowed Field. 1971. Courtesy the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.





Clearing, 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.





Mooring. 1971. Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Ewing,
Providence, Rhode Island.





Blue Territory. 1972. Collection of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.





Wet Orange. 1972. Courtesy the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.



Chasse Interdite. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.





Field for Two – II. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.

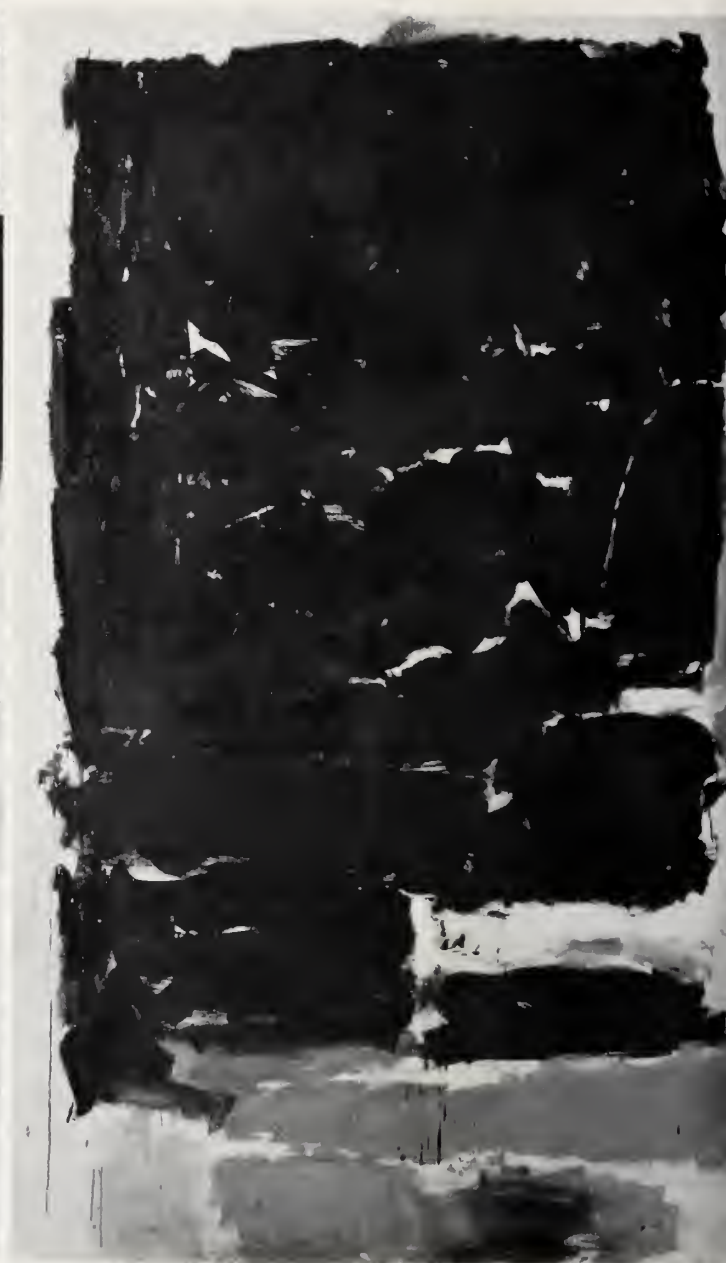
opposite: *They Never Appeared with the White.* 1973.
Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.



Closed Territory. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.

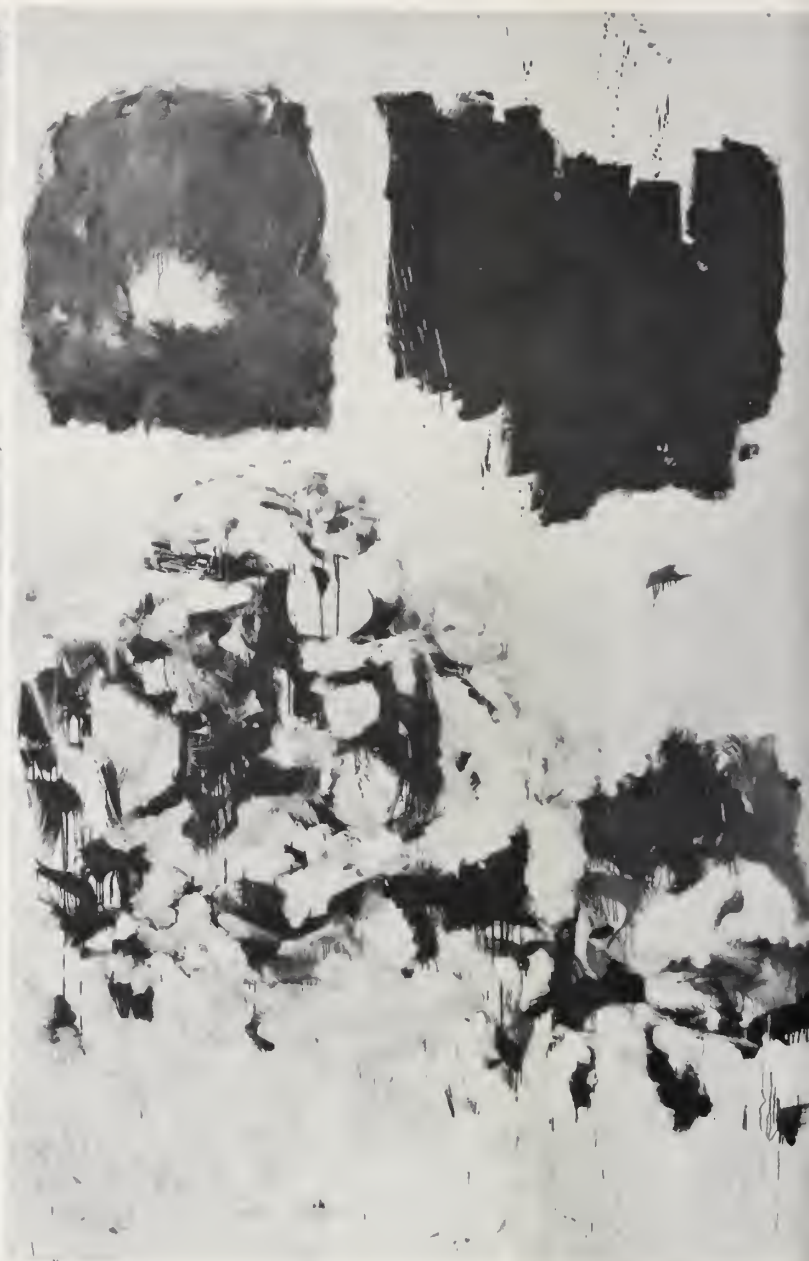








Iva. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.





Les Bluets. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.



Preface for Chris. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.



Close. 1973. Courtesy Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris.

Catalogue

List of Lenders

Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York
Mr. and Mrs. Leon Anthony Arkus, Pittsburgh
Moya Connell-McDowell, New York
Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Ewing, Providence, Rhode Island
Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris
Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Hillman, Pittsburgh
Martha Jackson Gallery, New York

Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width. The medium is oil on canvas. All work lent courtesy of Galerie Jean Fournier, Paris, unless otherwise noted.

1. *Sans Neige II*. 1969. 63 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 44 $\frac{3}{4}$. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Anthony Arkus, Pittsburgh.
2. *Blueberry*. 1969-70. 79 x 59. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Hillman, Pittsburgh.
3. *Salut Sally*. 1970. 112 x 79.
4. "*La Ligne De La Rupture*" A Poem by Jacques Dupin. 1970-71. 112 x 79. Lent by Moya Connell-McDowell, New York.
5. *White Territory*. 1970-71. 112 x 87.
6. *Bonjour Julie*. 1971. 112 x 230. Lent by the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
7. *The Fields II*. 1971. 32 x 127. Anonymous lender.
8. *Mooring*. 1971. 95 x 71. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Bayard Ewing, Providence, Rhode Island.
9. *Plowed Field*. 1971. 112 x 213. Lent by the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
10. *Blue Territory*. 1972. 103 x 71. Lent by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.
11. *Wet Orange*. 1972. 112 x 245. Lent by the Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
12. *Chasse Interdite*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 283 $\frac{1}{2}$.
13. *Close*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 141 $\frac{1}{2}$.
14. *Closed Territory*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 220 $\frac{1}{2}$.
15. *Field for Skyes*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 212 $\frac{1}{4}$.
16. *Field for Two — II*. 1973. 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 45.
17. *Clearing*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 236.
18. *Iva*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 236.
19. *Lac Achigon*. 1973. 94 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 70 $\frac{3}{4}$.
20. *Les Bluets*. 1973. 110 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 228 $\frac{1}{4}$.
21. *Preface for Chris*. 1973. 102 $\frac{1}{3}$ x 141 $\frac{1}{2}$.
22. *They Never Appeared with the White*. 1973. 94 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 141 $\frac{1}{2}$.

Chronology

by Pamela Adler

- 1926 February 12, born in Chicago, Illinois. Only child of James Herbert Mitchell, M.D., and Marion Stobel, poet.
- 1942 Received high school diploma from the Francis Parker School in Chicago.
- 1942-44 Attended Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.
- 1944-47 Attended the Art Institute of Chicago, graduating with a BFA degree.
- 1948-49 Lived in Europe on a traveling fellowship awarded by the Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1950 Returned to the United States, attended Columbia University. Earned an MFA degree from the Art Institute of Chicago. First one-woman exhibition, St. Paul, Minnesota.
- Early Painted in studio on St. Marks Place. Attended meetings at
1950s The Club and frequented the Cedar Tavern with Willem de Kooning, Philip Guston, Franz Kline and other Abstract Expressionists.
- 1951 Participated in the *Ninth Street Show* which was organized by the charter members of The Club with the help of Leo Castelli.
First one-woman exhibition in New York, at New Gallery.
- 1955 Traveled to Paris again, beginning to divide her time between France and New York.
- 1959 Moved into studio in the rue Frémicourt, Paris.
- 1969 Acquired the home and studio at Vétheuil where she now lives.
- 1971 Received honorary doctorate from Western College, Oxford, Ohio.
- 1972 Major one-woman exhibition, *Joan Mitchell, 'My Five Years in the Country,'* at Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York.
- 1973 Received 17th Annual Brandeis Creative Arts Award Medal.

One-woman Exhibitions

- 1950 St. Paul, Minnesota.
- 1951 New Gallery, New York.
- 1953 Stable Gallery, New York.
- 1954 Stable Gallery, New York.
- 1955 Stable Gallery, New York.
- 1957 Stable Gallery, New York.

- 1958 Stable Gallery, New York.
- 1960 Galerie Neufville, Paris.
Galleria Del Ariete, Milan.
- 1961 Stable Gallery, New York.
B. C. Holland Gallery, Chicago.
Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles.
Joan Mitchell Paintings 1951-61, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.
- 1962 *Paintings by Joan Mitchell*, The New Gallery, Hayden Library, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge.
Galerie Jacques Dubourg, Paris.
Galerie Lawrence, Paris.
Klipstein and Kornfeld, Bern, Switzerland.
- 1965 Stable Gallery, New York.
- 1967 Galerie Jean Fournier & Cie, Paris.
- 1968 *Joan Mitchell, Recent Paintings*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
- 1969 Galerie Jean Fournier & Cie, Paris.
- 1971 *Blue Series*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
Galerie Jean Fournier & Cie, Paris.
- 1972 *Joan Mitchell, 'My Five Years in the Country,'* Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York; and *Blue Series 1970-71* and *The Field Series 1971-72* at Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
- 1974 Ruth Schaffner Gallery, Santa Barbara, California.

Selected Group Shows

- 1950 Group Show, Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.
Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana.
- 1951 *Ninth Street Show*, New York.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1955 *U.S. Painting: Some Recent Directions*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1956 Group Show, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 1957 Group Show, The Arts Club of Chicago.
62nd Annual Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago.
Group Show, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

- Japanese International Exhibition, Tokyo.
Group Show, Minneapolis Institute of Arts.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Sculpture, Painting and Watercolors, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1958 Annual Exhibition of the Society for Contemporary Art, Art Institute of Chicago.
Group Show, Baltimore Museum of Art.
Pittsburgh International, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.
Action Painting, Dallas Museum for Contemporary Arts.
Gutai Group, Osaka, Japan.
Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy.
Group Show, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri.
Nature in Abstraction, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
The Museum and Its Friends, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1959 Art Biennial, Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
Documenta II, Kassel, Germany.
20th Biennale, Galleria Del Ariete, Milan, Italy.
V Biennale, Sao Paulo, Brazil.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1959-60 School of New York: Some Younger Artists, traveling exhibition organized by Stable Gallery, New York, with the American Federation of Arts, New York.
- 1960 Contemporary American Painting, The Columbus Gallery of Fine Arts, Ohio.
Business Buys American Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1961 Group Show, Binghamton Museum of Art, New York.
Pittsburgh International, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.
Group Show, Dayton Art Institute, Ohio.
Group Show, Museum of Art, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
American Abstract Expressionists and Imagists, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.
60 American Painters 1960, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1962 Group Show, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.
65th Annual Exhibition of American Painting and Sculpture, Art Institute of Chicago.
New Acquisitions, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Art Since 1950, Seattle World's Fair.
The First Five Years, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
Forty Artists under Forty, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and circulated to Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York; Rochester Memorial Art Gallery; Robertson Memorial Center, Binghamton, New York; Albany Institute of History and Art; Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse; Andrew Dickson White Museum of Art, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York.
- 1965 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1966 Art 75, Drexel Institute of Technology, Pennsylvania.
Flint Invitational, Flint Institute of Art, Ohio.
Painting, Watercolor and Drawing Annual, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
- 1966-67 Two Decades of American Painting, traveling exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art International Council, New York, and shown in Japan, India and Australia.
- 1967 Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture from New York, Delaware Art Center, Wilmington.
Large American Paintings, The Jewish Museum, New York.
Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, Krannert Art Museum, University of Illinois, Urbana.
Group Show, University Art Museum, University of Texas at Austin.
Annual Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
- 1968 29th Annual Exhibition of the Society for Contemporary Art, Art Institute of Chicago.
Group Show, Georgia Museum of Art, Atlanta.
Invitational, Kent State University, Ohio.
Group Show, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Foundation Exhibition, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
Art for Your Collection, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

- Art in the Embassies Program, Department of State, Washington, D.C.
- 1969 Group Show, John Bolles Gallery, San Francisco.
Wallworks Part I, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
The Recent Years, Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey.
Painting as Painting, University Art Museum, University of Texas at Austin.
- 1970 *Pittsburgh International*, Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.
Wallworks Part III, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York.
The Recent Years, Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey.
American Painting, 1970, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond.
Contemporary Women Artists, organized by the Skidmore Arts Committee, The National Arts Club, New York.
- 1971 *A New Consciousness—The CIBA-Geigy Collection*, The Hudson River Museum, Yonkers, New York.
Younger Abstract Expressionists of the Fifties, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

- Martha Jackson Gallery Collection*, Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan.
Art on Paper—Invitational, Weatherspoon Art Gallery, University of North Carolina, Greensboro.
- 1972-73 *Fresh Air School: Exhibition of Paintings: Sam Francis, Joan Mitchell, Walasse Ting*, assembled and toured by the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh.
- 1973 *Contemporary American Painting From New York Galleries*, Wilmington Society of Fine Arts, Delaware.
The Private Collection of Martha Jackson, Finch College Museum of Art, New York.
Women Choose Women, The New York Cultural Center, New York.
Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting and Sculpture, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
Contemporary American Drawings, 1963-1973, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.
Tenth Anniversary Invitational, University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee.

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by Libby W. Seaberg

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——— Statement in Whitney Museum of American Art, *Nature in Abstraction*, p. 75; excerpts from this statement appear also in Carnegie Institute, Museum of Art, *Fresh Air School*, n.p., and in

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